

Detailed template

A. General questions

A.1 Please provide a general summary of the programme.

Following the oil crisis of 09/2000, the French Government presented a National Program for the Improvement of Energy Efficiency (PNAEE) in which the creation of local energy information centres was a key measure. In 2001, ADEME, the French Environmental and Energy Management Agency, launched the nationwide network of local energy advice centres called Espaces Info Energie or EIE.

According to their charter, EIEs have two assigned and distinct missions:

- to provide free and independent individualized advice to the general public, organisations and small companies: “individualized energy advice”;
- to carry out outreach and information activities, by holding conferences, leading working-groups, organising on-site visits, participating in fairs and exhibitions, etc.: “outreach actions”.

The French EIE system mainly uses existing organisations: thus an EIE is created through a convention between ADEME, one or several financial partners (often regional and local authorities) and a host organisation. Host organisations are usually non-governmental organisations (associations) specialised in housing or environmental issues. The funds allocated by ADEME, the regional councils and other financial partners are intended to support one or several energy advisors within the host organisation but do not cover the full operation of the organisation.

Besides funding, ADEME also provides initial and permanent training for the energy advisers, produces brochures and support material, such as exhibits that the EIE can use in their activities. ADEME ensures the organization, animation and coordination of the national EIE network and, through its 26 regional delegations, that of each regional network.

The number of EIEs currently reaches 187 (340 advisers).

A.2 Please describe the goal of the programme.

The main goal is to influence habitual behaviour as well as increase the uptake of energy efficiency and renewable energy investments by the general public.

No quantified goal has been set for the global EIE network. In some regions, objectives are set for the EIE, e.g. a number of individual advice contacts to be reached yearly or a number of events to be organised. Such objectives are set out through an annual programme agreed upon between the host organisation and the financier(s). However, as the situations widely vary from one region to the next and often within the same region, setting quantitative objectives is not always feasible or desired.

B. Planning and preparatory phase

B.1 Please provide a summary addressing the following topics:

There are two underlying assumptions that led to the creation of the EIE network:

- the main assumption is that lack of information constitutes a barrier to the public's uptake of energy efficient behaviour
- the secondary assumption is that information should be provided at local level in order to a) correspond to local situations b) be more acceptable to the beneficiaries.

No formal needs assessment or segmentation of the target group was carried out prior to the creation of the EIE network. Rather, the system was modelled after existing advice systems elsewhere.

A monitoring and evaluation system was set up during the planning phase. It consists of a computer programme "Contacts-PIE" where the advisors regularly report advice and outreach activities. These reports are compiled and compared at regional then at national level.

C. Implementation phase

C.1 Describe the implementation of the programme

The EIE network operates both as a single national network and as distinct regional ones. At national level, the EIEs benefit from support from ADEME in the form of a 3-day introductory training course on energy management for each adviser and through access to ADEME's large catalogue of permanent training courses (from technical subjects to communication and organisation strategies). ADEME also carries out regular national media campaigns on energy efficiency and renewables that highlight the EIEs as the contact points for information. These campaigns are not, however, directly focused on the EIEs.

On the other hand, each regional network operates in an autonomous manner and there are widespread differences between regions (as well as between individual advice centres) in terms of main activities, communication, cooperation with other local organisations, etc. For example, in some regions, the EIEs are saturated in terms of the energy hotline and potential users of the service complain about not being able to get in touch with the advisors whereas in others, there are only around 300 phone calls per year.

These dissimilarities in terms of activities but also "quality of service" are one of the weakest points of the system.

The second major weak point is related to the professional status of most energy advisors. In general, these are relatively young and inexperienced people and they are employed through special government-aided temporary employment systems at relatively low salaries. There is thus a large turnover of staff: after 1,5 or 2 years of experience, many advisors can find better paid jobs elsewhere and thus leave the EIE system, which then has to find and train new advisors.

Finally, the system remains financially fragile (since ADEME only gives part of the funding required) and largely dependent on the will of local authorities to get involved in delivering energy advice to the population. Whereas several regions and cities actively support the local EIEs, still many of them have not taken too much interest in this initiative and provide little or no funding.

D. Monitoring and Evaluation

D.1 Please describe the monitoring activities addressing the following topics:

A dedicated computer programme was created to permit the EIEs to record and regularly report on their activities. The tool was designed with the energy advice component as a priority and thus allows more detail in recording this component than the one related to outreach activities.

Each adviser should report each individual contact, the theme of the discussion, the advice or documents transmitted, the type of behaviour change, renovation works or investment concerned, etc.

For the outreach component, the EIE fills out a form describing the event organised or participated in, the number of people "sensitised", the number of leaflets distributed, etc.

Two major problems arise with the monitoring activity:

- It takes up a lot of time and therefore it is not always updated by over-stressed EIEs
- There is little agreement on the nomenclature that should be used, or the formulas for evaluating, e.g. number of people "sensitised". Therefore, there are large disparities between results due to differing customs regarding reporting.

D.2 Please describe the evaluation activities addressing the following topics:

- evaluation process and procedure (evaluation objective i.e. what was evaluated, how was it evaluated, etc.)
- the effect of the programme in terms of outcome and the reasons for this outcome
- handling of free riders, spill-over and rebound etc. effects
- describe the process evaluation if any was undertaken (cost-effectiveness, co-operation of stakeholders, customer/consumer satisfaction etc.)
- was the goal of the programme (as mentioned in Q. 4) reached?
- who undertook the evaluation activities? (the implementing organisation, an independent organisation hired for the evaluation, or an evaluation committee)

Since its creation in 2001, the network has undergone three separate sets of evaluations:

- The first in 2003 was an evaluation of the energy advice component of the EIEs activities carried out at national level. It was carried out by an independent firm and had four objectives : to evaluate the satisfaction of users of the service, to identify the actions and change in behaviour generated, to estimate the impact on energy consumption and GHG emissions, to propose a methodology that would permit regular evaluations to be carried out.
- The second in 2005 was an independent evaluation of the outreach activity component and was carried out in three regions. It aimed to evaluate participant satisfaction, the energy impact of the EIE activity as well as to propose a methodology that would permit regular evaluations to be carried out in the field of outreach activities. The evaluators were not able to assess the energy impact of the outreach activities for several reasons, the main reason being the lack of a valid method to assess energy savings generated by outreach activities such as a conference or a press article.
- Using the methodology proposed in 2003, seven regional networks have carried out their own evaluations in 2006 and eight are scheduled to do so in 2007.

D.3 Please describe the factors that explain the success or failure of the programme and address at least the following points:

The evaluations show that the EIE network is neither a success nor a failure. Based on the 2003 evaluation (there are yet not enough regional ones to make a reasonable aggregation of the results from 2006), global beneficiary satisfaction is 90%, one out of four contacts decide to take action and many others state that they will continue to develop their "project". One in-depth contact leads to an average annual primary non-renewable energy saving of 0,16 tep and avoided emissions of 0,27t eqCO₂/year.

On the other hand, behaviour change appears as a weak point in the sense that the 2003 evaluation recommended that the EIEs devote more time and effort to promoting behaviour oriented measures. The 2005 evaluation showed that although the target group of the EIEs is the general public, the main category reached is that of already motivated people with a "project" in mind, usually linked to solar energy or passive construction.

D.4 Please describe the lessons learned

- positive and negative lessons learned
- have the lessons learned had an effect on the design of similar programmes?
- problems encountered and how they were dealt with
- success factors for replication elsewhere in Europe
- describe what you would do differently if you were to help others in replicating the programme

Two main lessons should be mentioned:

In order to improve its performance, the EIE network needs to improve its visibility in the general public. In fact, in 2005, only about 13% of the French population had heard of the EIE network. Likewise, in some regions, there is little or no demand for energy advice since the large majority of the population ignores that the service is available and adapted to their needs.

The second major lesson is that the partnerships with local authorities in setting up advice centres and networks is an essential factor of success. It is a necessary stepping stone especially for recently established advice centres. The lack of local support and interaction can constitute a strong hindrance to the efficient deployment of new and not so new EIEs.